Anheuser-Busch Serves Up Survey with a Twist...

Continued from page 13

Jeff Lawson, Director of Marketing Planning and Research for Anheuser-Busch, agreed: "The beer business is in a period of rapid change. Consumers are much more aware of different beer varieties and flavors, and this type of software lets us measure the subtle differences that consumers perceive between beer brands."

Anheuser-Busch worked with Adaptive Technologies Group (ATG) of Cleveland, OH to develop their customized Windows-based questionnaire. ATG partners with Sawtooth Technologies who is the developer of the Sensus interviewing products. The software used in this study was a prototype version of Sensus Q&A. For more information, call Sawtooth Technologies at 847-239-7300 or visit www.sawtooth.com.

TECH TALK

Can "Abandonware" Revive Forgotten Programs?

by Kevin Savetz, Freelance Technology Writer

"Abandonware" refers to software that is no longer sold or supported by its publisher.

If you're trying to get a copy of a program no longer available from its vendor, or whose vendor is no longer "available", ranging from the PFS:First Choice office suite or Borland's C++Builder Compiler, to older games like Zork and Ultima, you'll understand why the concept of "abandonware" is slowly but surely gaining popularity.

Abandonware refers to software that is no longer sold or supported by its publisher.

If you crave a simple office suite like PFS:First Choice, the instant-on utility of Borland's SideKick, the project-planning prowess of In Control, or even the questionable home-management capabilities of Microsoft Bob — well, they're gone.

Software is "abandoned" for countless reasons: the publisher released a new version; it was driven from the market by competition; or the producing company simply went out of business. In some cases, the software ran on hardware that became passé such as Amigas, Ataris, and pre-Mac Apples.

Publishers retain copyright even after a program is removed from the market, which effectively makes that title unavailable. Folks who want to get old software often find that it simply isn't available legally. You may be able to find a copy on eBay, but that can be a slow, risky proposition. Even if you're willing to go the eBay route, niche business applications that weren't available in computer stores can be nearly impossible to find — especially if you need several copies for your business.

Abandonware advocates are trying to change that by making old titles available on the Internet for free.

It's not just software — documentation, reviews of older software, and the text of old computer books and magazines have been abandoned and recovered again.

In a world where upgrading to the latest and greatest version of software is expected, worrying about software from last year or a decade ago seems backward. However, access to old software is essential for people who still use older computers, or those who simply hanker to play a favorite computer game from their youth, as well as those who are simply happy with the software they've been using for years.

Users who bought software five years ago and still use it, only to find the installer disks have failed, often find out the publisher is unable to replace them.

Dan Knight is publisher of Low End Mac, a Web site (www.lowendmac.com) devoted to keeping old Macintoshes up and running. "I like the abandonware idea, especially since it's almost impossible to buy software, new or used, for the oldest Macs — computers which remain viable word processing and e-mail machines even at a pedestrian 8 MHz," Knight said.

Continued on page 16

Can "Abandonware" Revive Forgotten Programs?...

Continued from page 15

Users Take Matters Into Their Own Hands

Dozens of web sites offer downloads of abandoned software, but those programs are usually posted without permission from the copyright holders. Of course, distribution of any software without permission from the copyright holder is software piracy. The Interactive Digital Software Association trade group has sued the webmasters of many abandonware Web sites, successfully taking several offline.

Whether there's a moral difference between posting abandoned software without permission and hosting a "warez" site, offering pirated versions of Microsoft XP for free, for instance, is a matter of debate. But the law says there is no difference — both are copyright infringement.

So other abandonware advocates take another route: simply asking publishers to give their old software away.

Teresa Knezek, a Web designer in Fairbanks, Alaska, has collected thousands of names for a petition (http://abandonware.mivox.com/) that implores publishers to release old software into the public domain. "We're close to the 5,000 signature mark, which is when I plan to shut down the petition itself, and start mailing it out (to software publishers)," Knezek said. "I'd like to think I could successfully solicit donations to have the whole thing printed out in big paper bundles, and ship these big reams of petition paperwork to software company legal departments everywhere."

Although a few software publishers are eager to help, many more are indifferent to the issue. "People who have approached companies individually about abandonware issues in the past have often run into 'its ours and we won't share' attitudes. I'm hoping overtures with a more 'official' feel – with more paperwork attached -- might initiate more of a dialogue," Knezek said. She is not expecting a wholesale change in the way commercial software licensing works, but is hoping one or two developers might open things up a bit.

"Software publishers have little to lose by adopting the abandonware category and placing seemingly obsolete software in that category," Knight said. "If they don't, they make pirates of those who have no legal access to the only software that will run on their antiquated hardware."

"Abandonware would provide a software source for those using sub-$100 Macs and PCs, allowing them to become computer literate and possibly Internet savvy, (and) preparing them for so many jobs that require familiarity with the computer, Knight added. "With over 60 percent of America wired to the Web, abandonware would make it possible for those who simply cannot afford a $999 iMac or $599 PC to at least get started with computers. It would also help keep a lot of old hardware out of the landfill, at least for a few years."

Examples

Here are examples of formerly commercial programs that are now available for free, with the blessings of their publishers.

- ThinkTank (PC) and MORE (Mac) outliner software (http://www.outliners.com).
- Acta outliner software (Mac) (http://www.a-sharp.com/acta).
- Antique versions of Turbo C, Turbo C++, and Turbo Pascal (PC). (http://www.community.borland.com/museum). Registration required.
- Allaire Forums (Windows, Solaris) (http://www.forumspot.org).
- Nisus Writer 4.1.6 word processor (Mac) (http://www.nisus.com/free).
- VisiCalc (PC) (http://www.bricklin.com).
- Scott Adams' adventure games (for PC, Palm, and other platforms) (http://www.msadams.com).
- Apple makes several old versions of the MacOS, from 6.0.3 to 7.5.3, available from its FTP site (ftp://ftp.apple.com/Apple_Support_Area/Apple_Software_Updates/English-North_American/Macintosh/System/Older_System).

Use your favorite search engine to search for "abandonware" and you'll find countless sites offering programs for download. A few, like Legal Abandonware make a point to offer only software that's been verified "okay-to-distribute." Other sites make a point not to do so, preferring to get forgiveness – that is, if they're caught by a legal department that cares – than permission. Many, if not most, abandonware sites focus on games, but there are plenty such as Underdogs (http://www.the-underdogs.org) and Prophet's Abandonware that offer applications and utilities, too. Dozens of sites of all persuasions are linked from the Abandonware Web Ring (http://www.abandonwarering.com).

Challenges and Obstacles

Making abandonware available legally is not without challenges. "If the original licensor has gone out of business, then there is no risk of being sued because an entity that no longer exists cannot have any legal rights to anything — the software thus enters the public domain," Marcy Gordon, a technology law expert for Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (http://www.cpsr.org), said.

But this seemingly good news is a rare occurrence — in most cases, another company acquires the rights to the floundering firm's software. "If another company acquires the rights, then one should approach that new company and request the rights," Gordon said. Easier said than done

Continued on page 17

Can "Abandonware" Revive Forgotten Programs?...

Continued from page 16

— figuring out who owns what, especially after years have passed, can be a challenge.

For instance, the Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium (MECC) was a prolific producer of educational software in the 1970s and 1980s. Broderbund later acquired MECC, along with 35 other companies. Broderbund itself was later acquired by The Learning Company. When one abandonware archivist asked The Learning Company for permission to distribute MECC's old titles, he was told the historic records were no longer available, thus the company was unable to confirm whether or not it owned those old titles.

Unless an attorney stumbles upon a file cabinet stuffed with those documents, the rights to dozens of MECC's educational applications are lost until their copyright expires — 95 years from when they were first published.

How To Do It

You don't need to be an attorney or work at a software publisher to bring new life to old software — anyone can help make it happen. The hardest part is often finding the right person to ask. If the company that published the software has been sold, you'll have to find out who bought it: A little Web research goes a long way here.

Once you find the company, it's time to approach their attorneys. Call the company's main office and ask for the legal department, or write to the company. The person you talk to may not have heard of the software you're referring to, so be ready to provide as many details as possible, including who published it, in what year, and for what platforms.

Also, know what you want. Asking for a license to distribute the software for free on your Web site may be reasonable to many publishers. Or perhaps you'd like the publisher to release the software into the public domain — an option that will be distasteful to many publishers who are unwilling to completely give up rights to their work, no matter how old. Don't expect an answer right away. Even once you find a helpful individual, it may take months for them to give you an answer.

"You need people inside the company that holds the copyright to champion it, politely remind them periodically, and be patient," said Dan Bricklin, who convinced Lotus to release Visicalc for free.

With research, schmoozing, and persistence — and a touch of luck — anyone can help bring old software back to life. Abandonware advocates bring useful software back to today's computers, and preserve a bit of computing history in the process.

Kevin Savetz is freelance computer technology writer. He runs two abandonware sites for Atari computer users: www.atarimagazines.com and www.atariarchives.org.

Q Research Solutions
The Source For Consumer Product Testing & CATI

Research is our middle name

CATI • WEB • IVR

Our Vision...
to be the best resource
in the Research industry

Patti Nelson, Client Services
732.952.0000
www.whoisQ.com

"Protecting Our Assets"
Respondent Cooperation Workshops

Sponsored by CMOR

Concerned about the continuing erosion of respondent cooperation rates?

Want to improve relations with the public, the key to the survival of all our businesses?

You need to check this out!

Protecting Our Assets II
February 3 – 4, 2003 • Orlando, FL

For details visit: www.cmor.org